

1.2 Morphemes

Most morphemes are monosyllables, but there are a few polysyllables and a rather larger number of prefixed syllables, where the 'prefix', a CV syllable with a drastically reduced inventory of segmental and tonal contrasts, is sometimes an identifiable morpheme and sometimes not. No prefix has a high degree of productivity. There is one productive use of reduplication. There is also a hint of tone-change as a derivational process. Morphophonemic alternations include vowel copying and tone

dissimilation in prefixes. Word formation is predominantly by compounding.

1.3 Lexicon

Form classes include Noun, Verb, Preposition, Demonstrative, Quantifier, Verb Particle and Sentence Particle. There is no class of adjectives, the translation equivalents of English adjectives being a subclass of Verb. Classifiers are a special type of bound Noun. Prepositions are few, and many locative meanings are expressed by Localizer Nouns that function as head of the NP object of a preposition. E.g. ‘inside the box’ is *dʒ kō kū*, literally ‘at (*dʒ*) the box’s (*kō*) inside (*kū*)’. Sentence Particles, at the end of the clause, mark things like aspect, polarity and illocutionary force; Verb Particles, clustering around the verb, mark aspect, modality, and adverbial notions ranging from the abstract, like ‘instead’ and ‘excessively’, to quite concrete, as ‘help to V’, ‘sneak, V stealthily’.

There is notable lexical elaboration in such areas as rice culture, carrying, cutting, and containers. There is no status marking, either in lexical paradigms or in special status-marking morphemes. In this latter characteristic Kayah Li resembles the languages of other non-literate, egalitarian cultures of the area, and differs from those found in literate, stratified cultures such as Thai, Burmese, Khmer and so on.

1.4 Syntax

Word order is SVO, with nominal modifiers preceding heads and verbal modifiers following. For example:

(1-1) vē ʔikē du

1s blanket big

my big blanket

(1-2) ne tétabō thāl ʔo

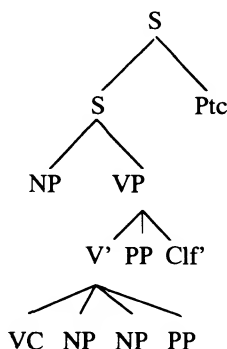
2s pencil water exist

your ball-point pen

The postposed verbal modifiers in both examples are clauses, the single word du ‘[be] big’ in (1) and thāl ʔo ‘water exists’ in (2), tétabō thāl ʔo being literally ‘a pencil that has liquid’.

Prepositions exist, but they are not of great importance in locative or syntactic function-marking. There is extensive verb serialization, mostly restricted to immediate concatenation of strings of lexical verbs, optionally preceded and/or followed by Verb Particles, the whole being known as the Verb Complex (VC). All larger verb-centered constructions in series are clause sequences, with the exception of one limited V' series.

Clause structure is:



The two NP daughters of V' are Indirect Object followed by Direct Object. Note the preferred position of Clf' (Quantifier +

Clf), regardless of which NP referent it ‘counts’. The following would be the normal way to express ‘four children have eaten’:

(1-3) púcè ʔe thō á dī sí lwī

child eat finish NS c.rice C:hum four

Four children have eaten.

Clauses that modify a nominal are called Attributive Clauses (AtrC), not relative clauses since there is no class of relative pronouns. They are of two kinds, postposed as in (1,2) above, and preposed, as:

(1-4) [ʔa ʔe tēú] təhe

3 eat fish one-C:group

the group that was eating fish

This illustrates the requirement that the nominal modified by the preposed AtrC must be a Clf', here consisting of the numeral tə-‘one’ and the classifier for groups of people he. The preposed AtrC is considered to be nominalized, preserving the generalization that nominal modifiers precede their heads.

Eastern Kayah Li

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